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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003930

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO, AF/E, AND AF/PD
ROME, PARIS, LONDON FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KPKO](#) [ER](#) [ET](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIAN MILITARY OCCUPIES FORMER UNMEE OUTPOST
IN TEMPORARY SECURITY ZONE

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3911

[B](#). ADDIS ABABA 3769

[C](#). ADDIS ABABA 3747

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (B), (D)
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[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. United Nations officials will publicly announce today that Ethiopia has violated the 2000 cessation of hostilities agreement, by occupying a strategic former UNMEE observation post within the Temporary Security Zone that provides access to Assab. UNMEE military observers abandoned the post in October, when Eritrean restrictions on UNMEE's freedom of movement rendered manning such posts untenable. Eritrea is aware of the Ethiopian move. UNMEE has formally protested Ethiopia's action, but has received no response from the Ethiopian government. The presence of Ethiopian troops in Eritrean territory is likely to complicate efforts to address the current stalemate. However, according to UNMEE's Chief Military Liaison Officer, it is highly likely that Eritrea has occupied a number of posts evacuated by UNMEE, although he cannot verify this, due to the GSE's limitations on UNMEE activities. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge, DATT, and deputy P/E chief met on November 22 with UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (DSRSG) Amb. Azouz Ennifar and Chief Military Liaison Officer Colonel Jarmo Helenius (strictly protect). According to the UNMEE officials, UNMEE military observers noted on November 18 that an Ethiopian infantry platoon was occupying "Point 885", one of 18 sites in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ) vacated by UNMEE following Eritrea's October 4 ban on UNMEE flight operations (ref C). Previously, Indian troops from UNMEE had manned Point 885, located east of Bure, at approximately 42 degrees east, in the TSZ's eastern sector. While the Temporary Security Zone lies entirely within Eritrea, Ennifar said both Ethiopia and Eritrea had previously appeared to agree that Point 885 was Ethiopian territory. He added that Ethiopian troops had said they would continue to occupy the former UNMEE post until UNMEE returns. Col. Helenius said that Ethiopian claims that they took control of this strategic site to prevent an attack are credible. Col. Helenius also said that Eritrea had likely occupied posts evacuated by UNMEE as well, but that UNMEE could not verify this.

[1](#)3. (C) Asmara-based UNMEE DSRSG Joel Adechi has informed the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) of the Ethiopian entry into the TSZ, Ennifar said, but the GSE responded that it had known of the Ethiopian move for four days, and was disappointed that UNMEE had not reported the event earlier. GSE officials also said that perhaps they would not attend the next meeting of the Military Coordination Commission, scheduled for November 24 in Nairobi. (NOTE: According to Major General Yohannes Gebremeskel, Head of the Intelligence Main Department, the Eritreans would likely attend the meeting. MG Yohannes will lead the Ethiopian delegation. END NOTE.) According to Ennifar, the Government of Ethiopia has made no formal acknowledgement of its entry into the TSZ, nor has the GOE responded to formal protests from UNMEE to both Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu (on November 19) and to Ethiopia's Ministry of Defense (on November 21). Ennifar noted that SRS Legwaila Joseph Legwaila was on medical leave for one month, to undergo surgery in New York.

[1](#)4. (C) Amb. Ennifar and Col. Helenius pointed out that there is a heavy presence of Eritrean troops in the TSZ, some of whom, when confronted by UNMEE, admit that they are military, although they wear militia uniforms.

U.N. TO DENOUNCE VIOLATION OF CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

[1](#)5. (C) Characterizing the Ethiopian entry into the TSZ as a "serious violation" of the June 2000 cease-fire agreement, Amb. Ennifar said that UN officials would publicly announce the Ethiopian move at the UN Spokesman's noon press briefing today, in New York.

16. (C) UNMEE had intentionally established an observation post at Point 885 due to the site's strategic value, Col. Helenius said, explaining that it commanded a ridge that looked over the surrounding area. Prior to vacating the post, UNMEE had dismantled and removed any infrastructure, he said. Col. Helenius noted that the Ethiopian platoon had communications equipment but no heavy weapons; Ethiopia's claim that its primary purpose was deterrence against an Eritrean attack was "credible," he said. Col. Helenius underscored that no violent actions against UNMEE personnel had occurred, and that there was "no direct threat." Both sides had publicly disavowed a first strike, but were taking actions to "humiliate" the United Nations and therefore push the international community to address the stalemate, Helenius commented.

17. (C) DSRSG Ennifar was concerned with Charge's observation that it seemed that the "reality on the ground" did not match recent public statements disavowing hostile intent made by Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki, and Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's view of a diminished threat from Eritrea given Ethiopia's strong hand. Ennifar expressed concern that while Eritrea did not acknowledge that it has troops within the Temporary Security Zone, the number of Eritrean "militia" within the TSZ was increasing, many of whom were likely regular Eritrean troops. Col. Helenius acknowledged that the number of Eritrean troops was unknown in areas where the GSE was denying UNMEE access, and that Eritrean troops were likely occupying former UNMEE posts as well.

18. (C) Large concentrations of Ethiopian troops are located near the border in the Badme-Sitona Triangle area (near the western sector of the TSZ) and along the Addis Ababa-Asmara axis (near the central sector of the TSZ), Col. Helenius said. DATT noted that during his recent visit to Adigrat (septel), near the TSZ's central sector, no large troop formations were visible on the Ethiopian side of the border, but that Ethiopian military commanders declared that the bulk of Ethiopian troops were situated just 20-30 kilometers south of the TSZ. Col. Helenius observed that Ethiopia's largest mechanized division was located near the central sector.

19. (SBU) Troop-contributing countries, particularly India, warned at their most recent meeting in New York, that they may withdraw peace-keepers from UNMEE, Amb. Ennifar said. Ennifar confirmed recent press reports that UN security officials had raised the threat level facing UNMEE staff in Eritrea, but said the withdrawal of UNMEE dependents had begun earlier as UNMEE was supposed to be an unaccompanied mission.

110. (C) COMMENT: Ethiopia's decision to take over an observation post vacated by UNMEE is consistent with its desire to prevent an attack from Eritrea. However, it is a proven violation, and, as such, raises serious issues. Prime Minister Meles told me that Ethiopia would not/not occupy the TSZ as Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin had stated to Japanese

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PermRep to the UN Amb. Oshima (ref B). Meles said that Eritrea and Ethiopia -- as long as neither wish to go to war -- could together work out security arrangements in the TSZ. Of course, this makes the possibility of mistakes or miscalculations more likely. END COMMENT.
HUDDLESTON